

TOM DAVIS, VIRGINIA,
CHAIRMAN

CHRISTOPHER SHAYS, CONNECTICUT
DAN BURTON, INDIANA
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, FLORIDA
JOHN M. McHUGH, NEW YORK
JOHN L. MICA, FLORIDA
GIL GUTKNECHT, MINNESOTA
MARK E. SOUDER, INDIANA
STEVEN C. LATOURETTE, OHIO
TODD RUSSELL PLATT, PENNSYLVANIA
CHRIS CANNON, UTAH
JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR., TENNESSEE
GANDICE MILLER, MICHIGAN
MICHAEL R. TURNER, OHIO
DARRELL ISSA, CALIFORNIA
VIRGINIA BROWN-WAITE, FLORIDA
JON C. PORTER, NEVADA
KENNY MARCHANT, TEXAS
LYNN A. WESTMORELAND, GEORGIA
PATRICK T. McHENRY, NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLES W. DENT, PENNSYLVANIA
VIRGINIA FOXX, NORTH CAROLINA

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
TTY (202) 225-6862

<http://reform.house.gov>

HENRY A. WAXMAN, CALIFORNIA,
RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

TOM LANTOS, CALIFORNIA
MAJOR R. OWENS, NEW YORK
EDOLPHUS TOWNS, NEW YORK
PAUL E. KANJORSKI, PENNSYLVANIA
CAROLYN B. MALONEY, NEW YORK
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, MARYLAND
DENNIS J. KUCINICH, OHIO
DANNY K. DAVIS, ILLINOIS
WM. LACY CLAY, MISSOURI
DIANE E. WATSON, CALIFORNIA
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, MASSACHUSETTS
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND
LINDA T. SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER,
MARYLAND
BRIAN HIGGINS, NEW YORK
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT,
INDEPENDENT

“Telecommuting: A 21st Century Solution to Traffic Jams and Terrorism.”

Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce and Agency Organization
Chairman Jon C. Porter

July 18, 2006

I would like to thank everyone for being here today.

With an increase in traffic congestion, fuel prices, time away from one's family, and terrorist and pandemic threats, the time is ripe for the Subcommittee to examine the federal government's use of telecommuting. Years ago, many of us used to watch with awe when a member of the Enterprise crew from Star Trek would “beam up;” thus, allowing them to travel instantly from one location to another. Imagine how life would change if you could be literally anywhere at once?

Today, with affordable broadband access, webcasting, e-mail, Instant Messaging, and digital-quality video streaming, the only thing which separates the fantasy world of Star Trek and our modern world is that nobody has to actually travel anywhere. As technology races ahead, it becomes necessary for the government to adapt and take advantage of these changes. Taking advantage of available and reasonable technology has the potential to save millions of dollars in routine operations, as well as saving the federal government from spending potentially millions more in the event of a national disaster.

The effective use of telecommuting will provide for continued government operations during an emergency or disaster situation, increased efficiency and productivity in the federal government, and an increase in the quality of life of federal employees. All of this becomes more relevant when we consider the world in which we currently live. To insulate the daily operations of the Federal Government from disruption caused by an emergency situation, it is imperative that the Federal Government have an effective telecommuting policy that will allow

employees to work off-site in a critical time. Considering the constant threat of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and wide spread sickness (i.e. Avian flu), the Federal Government should be able to maintain operations even in times of crisis. The importance of Continuity of Operation Planning (COOP) was again underscored recently when massive flooding forced the Internal Revenue Service headquarters building to be closed until next year. We will hear how the IRS has responded to this disaster today. I know that my good friend and Ranking Member Danny Davis has done a lot of work on improving the continuity of operation planning for the federal government and I look forward to learning from him today.

Telecommuting can also have a huge impact on the traffic problems plaguing the major metropolitan areas nationwide. In my home state of Nevada, a federal employee commuting from his or her house in Green Valley to an office in Boulder City could take over an hour. With the national price per gallon average of gasoline reaching upwards of \$3.00 per gallon and energy costs rising everywhere in our nation, consumers and various levels of government are increasingly looking at new ways to be more frugal. While various solutions are currently being explored, such as hybrid cars, alternative fuels, and expansion of public transportation, the simple reduction of the number of travelers on the road is an idea that usually does not come up. Public transportation and hybrid cars are great, but nothing uses less fuel than not traveling at all.

Of course, if people are not traveling into work, then they are not in the offices. Office space, especially in major metropolitan areas is incredibly expensive. Not only must you pay for the actual space itself, but you must also pay utility fees, purchase office furniture, hire cleaners, and in many cases, maintain security. All of this adds up rapidly. The United States Patent and Trademark Office (“PTO”) reduced annual real estate expenditures by \$1.5 million annually – as its aggressive telecommuting program for its trademark attorneys has reduced the need for 3 floors of office space in its former Arlington, VA, headquarters. In addition, PTO has seen an increase in production and output by ten percent since implementing its telecommuting program. If all functions of a particular employee’s job can be performed remotely, and there is a clear means by which the employer can determine that work is getting done to a measurable standard and even more efficiently, isn’t it unfair to American taxpayers to not pursue telecommuting aggressively for the federal government?

The benefits of telecommuting are not strictly related to energy, economics, and emergency preparedness. Numerous studies have shown that teleworking employees tend to be happier in their jobs, and are more productive as a result. Telecommuting can be instrumental in serving the needs of the family. By allowing parents to build their lives around their families and not their long commutes, the Federal government puts productive parents at home to attend Little League games and school recitals.

I fully understand that every employee is not eligible for telecommuting. But the truth is that there are many employees in a given office setting who are perfectly suited to be telecommuters, yet agencies are not currently taking advantage of it. This may be due to management fears, cultural change, or perhaps a lack of awareness of the available technology or even a lack of central leadership pushing agencies and managers to the many advantages of telecommuting. Notwithstanding the excuses, this has got to improve. In his testimony before the Subcommittee last November Congressman Frank Wolf testified that “roughly 60% of the

jobs in [the] region are jobs whereby people can telework.” While 60% of all jobs found with the National Capitol Region qualify for telecommuting, only 12% actually do. Therefore, nearly 180,000 out of the 300,000 employees could work at a location other than their official work site. Offices and cubicle spaces can be eliminated, downsized, or shared as employees come to the official work site less and less. It is absolutely essential that all federal agencies implement an effective telecommuting policy to be prepared in the event of an emergency, to increase production and efficiency, and to improve the quality of life of its employees. The American taxpayers deserve nothing less.

I look forward to the testimony of all the witnesses we have today and I would like to especially thank the IRS for its willingness to testify on such short notice, while under very hectic and difficult circumstances.